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SUBJECT: GUANTANAMO SUICIDES SPUR NEW CRIES IN AUSTRALIA  
FOR DAVID HICKS' RELEASE

REF: CANBERRA 599

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SUMMARY

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¶1. (SBU) Three detainee suicides at the Guantanamo Bay Detention facility on June 10 unsurprisingly have brought renewed calls for the release of Australian detainee David Hicks. An Australian Parliamentary motion calling for the closure of Guantanamo and the return of Hicks to Australia narrowly failed in the Senate on June 14. The Charge responded to a separate inquiry from a Member of Parliament on allegations by University of Wisconsin Professor Alfred McCoy that psychological torture of Hicks at Guantanamo had left Hicks in a severely damaged mental state. Despite growing public sentiment against the facility, Australian PM Howard and his Cabinet are steadfast in their support for USG policy and their belief that Hicks has been, and will continue to be, treated fairly as his case is processed at Guantanamo. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) In the wake of three detainees committing suicide at Guantanamo Bay on June 10, Australian civil rights groups, members of the media, criminal defense lawyers and opposition Labor Party politicians, as well as the Green Party Senate leader, have again called variously for the U.S. to immediately release Australian detainee David Hicks; for Guantanamo Bay to be closed as a detention facility; and/or for the Australian Government to do more to secure Hicks' release.

¶3. (SBU) Hicks' Adelaide-based Australian lawyer, David McLeod, told "The Sydney Morning Herald" newspaper on June 12 that the news of the "successful suicides would go around the camp like wildfire and no doubt cause (Hicks) and other detainees to reflect on their own positions." "David Hicks has stopped eating and is shedding weight at an alarming rate," reported one breathless news account. According to Hicks' American military attorney, Hicks had stopped eating, not because he is on a hunger strike, but because he has "just lost the desire to eat. He's not coping," U.S. Marine Corps Major Michael Mori affirmed. On Australian ABC radio, Mori complained: "I found him very desperate for human

contact. He'd lost a lot of weight." Hicks' father, Terry Hicks, told Channel Seven News that he was not surprised that the detainees had committed suicide given their conditions and treatment.

14. (SBU) On June 14, Greens Party leader, Senator Bob Brown, was joined by Labor and Australian Democratic MPs in a motion calling on the U.S. Government to close Guantanamo Bay and to ensure a fair trial for Hicks. After the motion failed 34 to 28, Brown issued a media release alleging that Guantanamo Bay is "anathema to the rule of law" and "should be closed immediately," adding that, "No other government in the world has abandoned its citizens to this illegal system." "John Howard alone remains subservient to the Bush Administration in this matter," he concluded.

15. (SBU) On June 14, Australian Member of Parliament Michael Danby, who is strongly pro-Alliance, asked the Charge to comment on allegations by University of Wisconsin professor and author Alfred McCoy that David Hicks' was being held in extreme isolation, subjected to systematic psychological torture, and that Hicks' lawyer Joshua Dratel had found Hicks in a "severely damaged and stressed psychological state." In a written response drawing on Washington guidance, the Charge rebutted the thrust of McCoy's statements, which were contained in the "Monthly" magazine and elaborated during a June 13 Lateline interview with McCoy. The Charge cited USG denials that Hicks is kept in solitary confinement, and noted that Hicks has daily access to a reading room, exercise area, and hot showers, and can meet privately with his lawyers and representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

16. (SBU) Asked about the Hicks case after the suicides, PM Howard stated on June 12 that a recent consular visit to Guantanamo Bay by Australian officials raised no concerns for

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Hicks. "I've been told that he received a consular visit about two weeks ago and the report from that consular visit was positive," the PM said. FM Alexander Downer also publicly stated that he was satisfied that Hicks was not a suicide risk and that his only health complaint was a bad back which Hicks raised with consular officials when he met them on June 8. "He complained about some back ailment that he's had for a long time," Downer told ABC radio and added, "but he didn't seem particularly depressed according to the reports I've read." After commenting that Hicks was not held in solitary confinement, was able to read, exercise, and could mix "with other detainees from time to time," Downer concluded: "I'm satisfied that his health and welfare are fine." Attorney General Phillip Ruddock told reporters that the Australian government has spent in excess of AUD250,000 (approx. USD186,000) representing Hicks and said that officials have visited him at Guantanamo Bay on at least 14 occasions.

COMMENT  
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17. (SBU) Media attention to the Hicks case follows a wave pattern over time. We are currently observing a peak. The suicides of the three Guantanamo detainees provided an opportunity to Hicks' defense team, which has generated public antipathy to his continued detention with the assistance of sympathetic media. John Howard and his Government have taken pains to defend our actions consistently, even if it costs them short term political points. End Comment.

18. (U) This message has been coordinated with Embassy Canberra.

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